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TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: IMPROVEMENTS IN THE NORTH BUT CHALLENGES REMAIN

REF: A) Colombo 623 B) Colombo 621 C) Colombo 577

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: From June 17 to 18, Charge, with the USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) regional advisor and information officer, traveled to Vavuniya District in northern Sri Lanka. They met with local Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) authorities and U.N. and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, and visited USAID/OFDA-funded health, shelter, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs implemented at the Manik Farm camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs). The majority of the programs are funded through the USAID/OFDA-supported umbrella grant with the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). The team observed that access to enter Manik Farm has improved. Access to freely interact and interview IDPs, however, remains restricted. Release of vulnerable IDPs from camps is moving forward, but the process has been slow. Freedom of movement continues to be a major issue. Lack of transparency with screening and registration procedures remains a concern. The GSL has not yet disclosed a timeframe and strategic framework that outlines how the IDP return process will occur. Administration of camp management remains under the control of the Competent Authority (CA). The U.S. Government (USG) continues to support health and WASH emergency interventions at Manik Farm. End Summary.

Access Improves, Serious Restrictions Remain

12. (U) On June 17, Charge and USAID/OFDA staff met with U.N. representatives to discuss the current humanitarian situation at the Manik Farm IDP camp in Vavuniya District and challenges facing U.N. staff in conducting their emergency interventions. Office of the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) staff reported that vehicle and personnel access to Manik Farm has improved in recent weeks. Several procedures, including issuance of ID cards to local NGO staff and lists of U.N. and international NGO staff pre-cleared to enter Manik Farm, are in place. However, some organizations continue to face delays to enter Manik Farm and have to negotiate individual entries on an ad-hoc basis with zonal commanders.

13. (SBU) The U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) noted that there are two

types of access. The first type is entry to Manik Farm and the second one is access to IDPs. Without access to IDPs, humanitarian agencies cannot collect critical protection data. UNHCR also raised serious concerns over the inability to interview and interact freely with IDPs in order to understand their issues and provide adequate assistance and reliable reporting. (Note: UNHCR is allowed to conduct household surveys and interview IDPs at transit sites only. End Note.) UNHCR protection activities, though, are ongoing but UNHCR staff noted that they are difficult to do in this context without calling attention to their purpose. NGO implementing partners explained that if the purpose of the visit to Manik Farm is to carry out protection activities and/or end-use monitoring, implementing partners often bring a few relief emergency supplies in their vehicles to give the impression that they are distributing commodities instead, thus gaining access.

Freedom of Movement and IDP Releases

¶4. (SBU) The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that as of June 11, the GSL had released an estimated 3,000 people - including people over 60, people with learning disabilities, and other vulnerable groups - from IDP camps to host families and elders' welfare centers. In a meeting with Vavuniya Government Agent (GA) Mrs. P.S.M. Charles clarified that a total of 8,000 people have been allowed to leave, but approximately 5,000 IDPs were waiting for their relatives. UNHCR noted, however, that the process is moving forward very slowly. UNHCR stated that one of the main issues is that the GSL is not clearly communicating to IDPs the process for releasing these groups. According to UNHCR, every rule seems to have an exception such as people over 60 kept in the camp if they appear healthy.

Lack of Transparency with Registration

¶5. (SBU) U.N. representatives informed Charge and USAID/OFDA staff that it is unclear how IDP registration and screening procedures are being conducted by the GSL and how long the process will take. The GSL Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services and the Presidential Secretariat plan to complete IDP registration before ID cards are issued.

¶6. (SBU) The U.N. knows of three GSL agencies registering IDPs -- the Vavuniya GA, the Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services, and the Presidential Secretariat. The U.N. also assumes that GSL military intelligence - reportedly wearing plain clothes at Manik Farm to remain indiscernible from IDPs - is conducting registration of IDPs. The U.N. does not have access to and is prohibited from participating in the registration and screening procedures.

Uncertain Future; De-mining and Returns

¶7. (SBU) As the humanitarian situation at the IDP camps gradually improves, post is actively engaged with the GSL on its plans for returning IDPs to areas of origin. It is uncertain how long the GSL plans to keep IDPs at Manik Farm and when and how swiftly returns will occur. The GSL has indicated that it plans to return the bulk of IDPs who moved from the former safe zone to GSL-controlled territory in 180 days. (Ref B) However, the GSL has not yet disclosed a timetable and strategy for the 180-day IDP return plan. It is unknown what the plan will entail and when it will be launched. In a June 18 meeting with the Charge and USAID/OFDA staff, the Vavuniya GA noted that the progress and completion of de-mining activities will determine the rate of IDP returns. U.N. and NGO partners have advocated, however, that de-mining should not be treated as the only viable criteria for the release of IDPs. For example, upon the Charge's question to a group of IDPs at Manik Farm as to whether they had relatives or friends to go to in the event they were released before de-mining was completed, all IDPs demonstratively said they did.

Transition from Military to Civilian Authority

¶8. (SBU) The Vavuniya GA reported that, despite a GSL announcement three weeks ago of the transfer of responsibilities for camp

management in Manik Farm and transit sites in and around Vavuniya District from Competent Authority Major General Chandrasiri to her, the CA remains in full control as administrator of Manik Farm. (Ref A) In addition, there is little coordination between the CA and the GA. The GA also mentioned that only she is allowed to enter Manik Farm; her staff is not permitted to visit the camp. However, the GA and her district government staff have a hand in many of the activities being planned and implemented at Manik Farm. Electrical power lines are running through the zones, a public address system is in place, learning spaces have been created and are being used, and a water distribution network is being built by the district Water Supply and Drainage Board. In addition, mobile bakeries, banks, shops that sell non-food items, meat, and fish are available in all zones. The GA also stated that the district Road Development Department plans to address drainage issues in zones 0, 1, 3, 4, and 15. The U.N. Office for Project Services (UNOPS) plans to address drainage issues in Zone 2. The GA is also implementing vocational training for IDPs and plans to set aside low-lying areas of Manik Farm for cultivation.

Unaccompanied Children and Orphans

19. (SBU) The Charge and USAID/OFDA staff visited one of three temporary orphanages established in Zone 4 of Manik Farm. The temporary orphanage receives support from the GSL, UNICEF, and international NGOs such as Save the Children. Local GSL staff reported that the GSL plans to transfer the children to an existing orphanage in Vavuniya District on or about June 25. The GSL plans to transfer an additional group of children in other zones to Vavuniya. According to the GA, approximately 1,000 children are residing in temporary orphanages, including 400 orphans and 600 unaccompanied children. (Note: Some of the children were not orphaned during the last stages of the conflict between GSL and LTTE forces. Some orphans who were displaced during the last phase of the conflict were transferred from an orphanage in Kilinochchi. End Note.) The GA plans to release as many children as possible from the orphanage to family and friends. The children who have no place to go will continue to receive support at orphanages in Vavuniya.

USG Responds to Health and WASH Needs

10. (U) In response to the pressing health needs at Manik Farm IDP camp site, the GSL Ministry of Health (MOH) plans to establish 21 primary health centers to provide services to the IDP population. The USG, through USAID/OFDA, contributed nearly USD 881,000 to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to establish 10 of

the 21 planned primary health centers in Manik Farm, as well as provide three ambulances. (Ref C) The assistance, which is supporting nearly 50 percent of the planned primary health centers, is benefiting an estimated 100,000 IDPs. Of the 10 planned primary health centers, IOM has established four in Zone 2, two of four are up and running in Zone 4, and two are planned for Zone 5. The clinics—equipped with two pharmacies and staffed with MOH doctors and nurses—are providing diagnosis, emergency care, health education, and referrals to regional hospitals.

¶11. (SBU) In addition, USAID/OFDA provided emergency health supplies to and is supporting two referral hospitals in zones 2 and 4 implemented by NGO Medical Teams International (MTI) through UMCOR umbrella grants totaling more than USD 278,000. The two referral hospitals receive a total of up to 3,000 IDP patients per day. (Note: MTI reported that at the peak of the emergency – the first two weeks following the end of the conflict – the referral hospital in Zone 2 received an estimated 15,000 people. MTI also informed the USAID/OFDA staff that during this period between 30 to 40 IDPs died per day at Manik Farm from dehydration and other conditions. End Note.)

¶12. (U) To help improve the WASH sector at IDP camps, including Manik Farm, USAID/OFDA has provided nearly USD 1 million through the UMCOR umbrella grant. The contribution is supporting the provision of WASH facilities such as latrines, bathing areas, and water systems; construction and rehabilitation of WASH structures; hygiene education materials and programs; and cleaning supplies through implementing partners Sewalanka, Arbeiter-Samariter Bund (ASB), Relief International, World Concern, CARE, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), People in Need (PIN), and IOM. USAID/OFDA is also supporting UNICEF through the 2009 Common Humanitarian Appeal (CHAP) to support WASH projects in IDP camp sites in northern Sri Lanka, including Manik Farm. Activities include the provision of drinking water and hygiene and sanitation education services to IDPs. (Ref C)

¶13. (SBU) COMMENT: The GSL, U.N., and NGOs have made extraordinary efforts to establish Manik Farm within a short period of time. While Manik Farm is not yet up to international humanitarian "Sphere" standards, humanitarian conditions, as well as access, have improved in recent weeks. Despite these efforts, great challenges remain to meet the basic needs of all IDPs and create an infrastructure sufficient to withstand the monsoon season which is expected to begin in October. We will continue to press the government to accelerate the pace of releases of IDPs to host families.

MOORE